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Canada: Ottawa officials have privately taken a negative position on the US note urging a conference on the Arctic. (Page 7)

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Canada: High-level Ottawa officials have privately taken a negative position on the latest US note urging an international conference on the Arctic, but have left the door open for an official favorable response if their misgivings are satisfied.

Their basic objection appears to be procedural rather than substantive. External Affairs Ministry Under-Secretary Ritchie, together with other Canadian representatives conveyed the impression to the US deputy chief of mission yesterday that even limited US-Canadian cooperation prior to a conference--presumably the US call for a joint working group to draft elements of an Arctic treaty in advance of an international meeting--would require cabinet-level approval and the approval of Prime Minister Trudeau. They did not see how they could gain such approval prior to Trudeau's departure tomorrow for Asia.

The Canadians did say they found the US note of 6 May a "constructive advance" over the earlier one. Nevertheless, they insisted that they must know whether the agenda the US is contemplating for the conference comprises only "agreed standards of pollution control and the safety of navigation." They are clearly wary that Washington might see to it that the conference agenda is expanded to include other matters that Ottawa would not find proper subjects.

Ottawa, if convinced that the US has no such hidden cards up its sleeve, may agree to informal discussions not for the specific purpose of joint drafting but to talk about the possible scope of a treaty and the problems each government foresees.

Ritchie was cautious during the conversation. However, the other Canadian officials who are probably more technically familiar with the issue--seemed to find the US presentation reassuring. US representatives in Ottawa believe that if they can properly confirm that Washington does not intend to go beyond questions of pollution control and navigation at a conference, further informal talks may be "fruitful."

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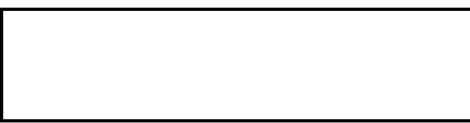
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